

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Family  
Independence  
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## New technology initiative launched

### Department of Information Technology will be 20<sup>th</sup> state agency Will combine information technology activities into one department

LANISNG—As part of a bold plan to keep Michigan on the cutting edge of technological change, Governor John Engler signed Executive Order 2001-3 on Aug. 9. The order, which is effective Oct. 14, unifies all information technology (IT) management functions in a new department.

The new **Department of Information Technology** will establish a long-term strategy that allows for better management of technology investments, improved information management and more efficient services to citizens.

“This technology initiative builds on the success of the e-Michigan Office and will help all state departments do a better job serving the people of Michigan,” said Engler. “The fast pace of technological change demands a unified approach so that Michigan can stay in the lead.”

When the order takes effect, the creation of the Department of Information Technology will bring the total number of principal state departments to 20, the limit provided for in the Michigan Constitution.

Information technology services currently scattered across state government will be transferred to the new department. These include:

- Software application development and maintenance.
- Management and support of desktop computers, mainframes and servers.
- IT contract, project and procurement management.
- IT planning and budget management.
- Telecommunication services, security, infrastructure and support.

“The transition director, Brian DeBano of the governor’s office, will work with agencies to develop written agreements specifying the positions and functions that will be transferred to the new department,” said Family Independence Agency director Douglas E. Howard. “Until details are worked out, information technology staff will continue to report to the same work site and manager and work on the same projects.”

The FIA transition team includes deputy director Mark Jasonowicz, human services director Mike Masternak and chief information officer Mike Scieszka.

A cabinet-level chief information officer, who will be appointed after a nationwide search, will lead the Department of Information Technology. The new department is expected to have approximately 1,800 employees who will be transferred from within state government. No additional appropriation of resources will be needed. Other key initiatives in Governor Engler’s technology strategy include:

- e-Michigan, which has already coordinated the launch of the state’s new web portal, featuring more than 70 interactive functions.
- Cybercourt, a plan to provide high-tech businesses with an online court system to settle disputes.
- the Life Sciences Corridor, a \$1 billion state investment in basic research and commercial applications of cutting-edge technology.
- Smartzones, 10 communities where increases in property tax revenues will be invested to stimulate the growth of technology-based businesses and jobs and to create clusters of new and emerging firms.
- LinkMichigan, a plan to provide broadband access to the Internet to more individuals and businesses.

# New report: welfare reform working

Report to U. S. Congress shows less welfare dependency, greater work force attachment

■ The report is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/indicators01/>



Tommy Thompson

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Families are better off under welfare reform, according to a report from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

On Aug. 21, HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson released a new department report that shows welfare dependency has not only fallen dramatically but families also are faring significantly better financially since welfare reform was enacted nationwide in 1996.

Released on the fifth anniversary of signing of federal welfare reform legislation, the “Indicators of Welfare Dependence” annual report to Congress shows that the poverty rate has fallen, more former welfare recipients are working and the number of Americans dependent on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is down.

“Five years later, welfare caseloads across America have decreased by remarkable amounts, but more important is the fact that these families are better off,” Thompson said. “Welfare reform is lifting people up, helping them to find jobs and succeed.”

Among the report’s findings:

■ As welfare consumption fell between 1993 and 1998, the poverty rate for all individuals also fell from 15.1 percent in 1993 to 12.7 percent in 1998. It dropped even further in 1999 to 11.8 percent, the lowest rate since 1979.

■ In 1998, 3.8 percent of the total population received more than half of their total family income from TANF, food stamps and/or SSI, down considerably from 5.8 percent in 1993.

■ This drop in dependency reflects the drop in cash assistance TANF. The U.S. “reciprocity rate” for cash assistance TANF fell from 5.4 percent to 3.2 percent between 1993 and 1998, while food stamp reciprocity rates fell from 10.5 percent to 7.3 percent over the same period.

■ Work force participation increased considerably among TANF families between 1993 and 1998.

In an average month in 1998, 56 percent of TANF recipients lived in families with at least one family member in the labor force. That is up from 43 percent in 1993.

“This report shows that welfare reform has helped an unprecedented number of Americans enter the work-force,” Thompson said. “At the same time, we must continue to work together to continue to create more opportunities for all families, move more people into the work force and help them climb the career ladder.

“Welfare reform is proving to be a compassionate and effective way to help families escape poverty and move toward a higher quality of life.”

Enacted by Congress and signed into law in August 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 dramatically changed the nation’s welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for cash assistance. The act contains work requirements combined with supports for families moving from welfare to work, including increased funding for child care and continued eligibility for medical coverage.

***Since August 1996, the national welfare caseload has fallen from 12.2 million recipients to 5.8 million - the largest decline in history and the lowest percentage of the American population on welfare since 1965.***

## ***From the Director***

***By Douglas E. Howard***

**Director, Family Independence Agency**



### **Food Stamp Program reporting**

Recently, newspaper stories appeared around Michigan about the Food Stamp Program. Many did not include information that, if used, would have provided a more realistic picture. One story correctly stated the application form for food stamps is 16 pages long, but did not indicate the applicant is only required to provide information on 6 of those pages.

These stories usually addressed concern over declining food stamp use. There has been concern nationally about the reduced number of people receiving food stamp benefits. In Michigan, however, that trend is in reverse. The food stamp caseload increased from 250,652 in June 2000 to 287,730 in June 2001.

Some local FIA offices stationed staff in shelters and community agencies to help people apply for food stamps. The FIA has also provided input to a food stamp outreach project the Center for Civil Justice received a federal grant to operate.

While the Family Independence Agency grants more than \$500,000 to the Michigan Food Bank Council annually, we cannot document that people losing eligibility for food stamps is the primary cause for increased food bank use. Perhaps increased awareness of food banks has drawn other working families and/or vulnerable adults not on food stamps that use food banks as a way to stretch their budget.

One of the major reasons the participation rates have dropped nationally is the complexity of the food stamp eligibility rules. There are more pages or rules and regulations for this program than most, something you know only too well if you help our customers apply for food stamps. State government leaders everywhere are working with the U. S. Congress to reduce this burden.

Until Congress reinvents the Food Stamp Program to better address current needs, I do not believe the participation rate will reach the levels of the 1980s. While the Food Stamp program will always be an important safety net for vulnerable individuals, perhaps if it is reinvented, perhaps we can better support people in moving to work. Then if the participation rate does not return to levels of the 1980s, it would be because of families achieving self-sufficiency.

After all, the goal is to help people become independent of government benefits, not more dependent.

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# Intercepted letters

**To:** Bill Denemy, Director  
Alcona-Iosco County Family Independence Agency  
**Date:** July 25  
**Subj:** Customer service

This office is a great example of what can and should be accomplished in government efficiency. Your folks create an efficient people flow, while being courteous and respectful of those in awkward circumstances. Thanks you very much for one of the few positive contacts since I returned to Michigan.

[Lee Williams](#)

Oscoda

■ Williams lives in Oscoda, an Iosco County town. He submitted this on a customer response card.

**To:** Julia Hadas, Director  
Marquette County Family Independence Agency  
**Date:** July 31  
**Subj:** Thanks for the help

I had a small crisis at my house. I was taking real estate classes, and while I was gone, my husband spanked my son and left a mark on him. When I arrived home after the last night of school, I had a house full of people. There were policemen and social workers. They could have been very nasty, but they weren't. We had the best people handling our situation. Doug York was the children's services specialist. He was outstanding! He was very concerned for my son (and) I felt he asked all the right questions. Before he left, he had a Danielle Gourneau, from the Teaching Family Homes, step in right away. She is outstanding too!

She was very soft spoken and yet very much to the point. I could tell that she was all about getting things straight. She said, before leaving that night, "If we felt we couldn't handle the pressures of our children to call her any time night or day." We didn't have to call her on a count of pressures, but she did take our children for sleigh rides and to the movies. Once she even took the children on New Year's Eve (my anniversary), so my husband and I could have some time to ourselves.

She came every day for weeks, she showed us many things that could help us focus on the positive side of parenting. It has been very helpful and is still working after many months later.

After Danielle's time with us, we had Kim McGlone from the Health Department. She's outstanding as well! She was very helpful and very much interested in education. She brought all sorts of tapes, books, and articles from the Internet to get us all the information we needed for my son, who has Attention Deficit Disorder. She also helped us when we were financially unwell for a short time. She made many calls to help us and didn't stop until things were better.

Then, we had the opportunity to seek counseling. We saw two counselors, Pat Frie and Dan Maas. Pat help us with Reese my son and the ADD, and Dan helped us with everything. The pressures of being looked at under a magnifying glass, and the every day pressures of life. He helped us get things in order and brought us to a place where we can be better people to our selves and to our children. Outstanding again!

Thank you! The system is working! I'm glad you've chosen your people so well. All these people have a hard job. I couldn't do it. If any one of these steps were not so tightly taken care of, our family would not be as well as it is.

Thank you again, I can't say it enough! I want to let you and anyone that is concern with these matters, know that our money is being spent well! The people they have are some of the best out there, hold on to them. And give them the necessary raises they deserve. Thank you, for taking the time to read this letter and have a very nice day!

[Julie Hand-Burke](#)

Gwinn

(more next page)

#### **To the Supervisor of Doug York:**

I didn't say enough about Doug York in my other letter. Doug was there for me as a mother who wanted to the best for her family in crisis. He was in his office late, a couple of times when I was trying to leave a message on his voice mail, and he picked up the phone, (unusual for a social worker). He met with me when I needed advise and made sure every one of the other agencies were doing their jobs.

I can't say enough good things about Doug and his dedication to his client and his job. He wanted to help my son and our family as a whole, that was clear.

Thank you for employing him, he took a bad situation and made it well again. He was right there with Kim McGlone when our finances were not well. He stayed on it until things got better.

I can't remember how many times I saw him and the countless phone calls all the agencies and I had to him. He took care of business and I'm sure we were not his only clients. He has a very hard job, you don't want to let this one go, he's a keeper!

Thank you for everything and a have a nice day!

**Julie Hand-Burke**

**Gwinn**

■ Doug York is a CPS employee with Marquette County FIA.

**To: Bill Denemy, Director**  
**Alcona-Iosco County Family Independence Agency**

**Date: Aug. 2**

**Subj: Marny Tucker**

I recently and reluctantly applied for temporary assistance with your office. I had lost my job and exhausted my unemployment benefits. My only recourse was to continue searching for employment and apply to the state of Michigan for assistance with food and utilities. I was very pleased when my assigned caseworker, Marny Tucker, handled my case in a most friendly and businesslike fashion. I am grateful to have been treated with such dignity and respect.

I had assumed that the entire qualification process would be somewhat embarrassing and time-consuming. It was just the opposite. Ms. Tucker processed and expedited all the required forms to administer my case and made me feel comfortable in what I had thought would be an unpleasant and lengthy scenario. I will no longer require state assistance in the near future and will surely never forget the kind and professional manner in which my case was handled. You are very luck to have an employee as skilled and caring as Ms. Tucker on your staff.

**Dean VanMeter**

**Oscoda**

■ Marny Tucker is an eligibility specialist for Iosco County FIA.



## **FIA Icon**

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# Positive attitude helps in strive for success

## Ingham County woman's attitude, desire helps her become the FIA's 93<sup>rd</sup> Achiever of the Month

By Gail Fournier, Project Zero Coordinator  
Ingham County Family Independence Agency  
Telephone 517-887-9419

LANISNG—Melissa Guggemos of Ingham County received the Family Independence Agency's monthly 93<sup>rd</sup> Achiever of the Month award Aug. 17. FIA director Douglas E Howard presented the award during a ceremony held at the new Capital Area Michigan Works! Service Center in Lansing.

Ingham County FIA director Janice Watkins introduced Howard, who told Guggemos the tribute highlighted not only her accomplishments, but also reflected favorably on the Ingham County FIA, Work First, Capital Area Michigan Works! Career Quest, the Capital Area Community

Services and the many family members and friends who have contributed to her climb toward economic independence and self-sufficiency.



**Melissa**



**Janice**

### Getting starting once again

Guggemos was a Lansing resident who came to the Family Independence Agency in 1992 for assistance. She had just moved to Michigan and was a single mother of two children, Adam and Allison. Her goal was to get established in the area.

The Ingham County FIA provided her family with AFDC—now known as Family Independence Program—benefits, Food Stamps (now delivered by the Electronic Benefits Program), Medicaid, and Child Care services.

Melissa is a high school graduate who found a job as a medical assistant with Lansing Management. She had worked about 18 months with that employer when her position was restructured. Melissa was advised that she did not have the required skills to perform the new position.

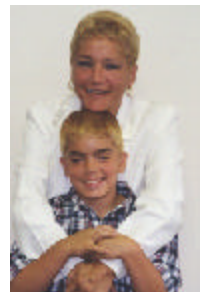
She also had surgeries pending on her hand for rheumatoid arthritis and was encouraged by her doctor to apply for benefits through the Social Security office due to her medical needs. Guggemos declined this advice and instead sought retraining so she could support her family.

### Unusual but meaningful support

Melissa was assigned to Work First in November 1998. When she first arrived her hands were bandaged from her recent surgery. She secured employment through Capital Area Community Services (CACS) Head Start working part-time as a parent intern. CACS is a multi-purpose human services agency serving Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties.

Her child care and housing issues were resolved with the help of FIA. One of her barriers to employment was transportation. She rode the bus or her bicycle, but her bike was in bad shape and needed costly repairs. Work First purchased a new bicycle for her and, between a monthly bus pass and the bicycle, Guggemos had reliable transportation.

Melissa remained focused on her goal of getting full-time employment to support her family. She knew that she needed retraining to accomplish this goal. Work First sent her to computer training through Career Quest in East Lansing. She was able to continue working and complete her computer classes during her time with Work First. Guggemos eventually moved to a full-time office position with CACS and has since gained a promotion, a raise and benefits.



**Melissa and 12-year-old son**

### **It pays to hang in there**

During her Aug. 17 ceremony Guggemos said: "It pays to hang in there; results don't happen overnight. The entire Work First network gave me a lot of support and showed me that people really care. Maggie (her Work First case manager) told me to dig down deep and look at going back to school – that I could do it. With that kind of encouragement I knew I could too."

The common theme of all of the guest speakers was her positive attitude, go get-em spirit and absolute perseverance in obtaining her goals.

Chad Hannahs, her family independence specialist at Ingham FIA, said he was honored to be able to work with someone that had so much determination and such a positive outlook.

Phil Thompson, her boss at Capital Area Community Services, said when he first met Melissa she was at a low point in her life. She came to CACS needing rental assistance and, at the close of their interaction, she told him he would not be seeing her there again. He knew then that she was determined to succeed.

Melissa's best friend, Bea Guty, said she never pitied Melissa, even when she was in her darkest hour with her medical and income issues. "Being around her actually made you become stronger. She just wouldn't quit," she said.

### **Continuing efforts toward goal**

Guggemos continues to strive toward her goals by taking classes at Lansing Community College. She would like to become a social worker, she said, saying it is about giving back to those that have helped her.

She is an advocate for the community working through her state representative, Virg Bernero of Lansing. Howard read a letter of congratulations from Melissa's state senator, Dianne Byrum of Onondaga, that celebrated Guggemos' success. Lloyd Fett, vice-chairperson on the Ingham County FIA Board, praised her efforts and gave her a gift certificate from the county.

In addition, this was not the first time Melissa has been cited for exemplary effort. Earlier this year she was acknowledged a recipient of the "Alumni of the Year" award for Capital Area Michigan Works!

Melissa Guggemos' "can do" spirit and motivation to provide a better future for her family and the community is what made her the perfect choice for Ingham County FIA's Achiever of the Month.



**Melissa enjoying her big day with Teresa Ellis (above left) and Michelle Hicks of Ingham County Family Independence Agency.**



**Bea Guty**

# Unusual help from exceptional people

## Pair in Montcalm County work to help local foster children Partnership by students extended to author, bank and FIA

By Jamie L. Lovelace, Children's Services Supervisor  
Ionia-Montcalm Family Independence Agency  
Telephone (989) 831-8499

Jaclyn McNeal and Diana Wesley have something in common. Jaclyn is 10 years old and attends Cedar Crest Elementary School in Greenville. She entered the fifth grade this school year.

Diana Wesley is 18 years old, graduated from high school in June and attends Central Michigan University. Both students decided to do something for foster children in Montcalm County. Some of what they started will most likely go beyond the county line.



**Jaclyn McNeal, with parents Mitch and Cheryl, stuffing luggage at home. Jaclyn knows children in foster care need to know they are cared for.**

### Jaclyn

Jaclyn McNeal is the daughter of Mitch and Cheryl McNeal, and sibling to Brendan and Austin McNeal. They reside in Greenville.

Jaclyn read "Chicken Soup for the Pre-Teen Soul" through the book club in school. Jaclyn read a story by Makenzie Snyder regarding her life while in foster care. The story had to do with plastic bags being for garbage, not for luggage. The author set upon a quest to provide a piece of luggage for all children in foster care.

Jaclyn discussed this story with her parents, classmates, and teachers at school. Because of Jaclyn's desire, they decided to take action on the matter and help local foster children.

Jaclyn approached her teacher, Deb Platko, and principal, Sarah Puterbaugh, at Cedar Crest to figure out a plan. They put together information in the school newsletter and items began pouring in.

The newsletter carried another article put in conjunction with the "Character Counts" program. Jaclyn sought to have luggage and stuffed animals distributed to foster children. Each piece of luggage or each bag would hold a stuffed animal and a letter from the author, Makenzie Snyder, indicating the purpose of the gift.

### Family support and participation

The McNeal family stores the items at home, stuffs the luggage, and contacts the Family Independence Agency in Montcalm County for distribution. This was fine but Jaclyn sought corporate donations for the project.

Huntington Bank is going to partner with her, do their own name tags, Jaclyn will compose her own letter to be inserted in luggage, offices from Sault Ste. Marie south will be collecting luggage and stuffed animals. Cheryl McNeal will provide me with Huntington Bank contacts. I told her we would most likely need banks to call FIA in their county to arrange pick-ups.

Huntington will be doing marketing on this. This connection with Huntington Bank, a statewide

organization, makes it possible that the plan Jaclyn hatched in elementary school may become a statewide or multi-region effort.

### Why?

Jaclyn understands that children in foster care need to know they are cared for. Before Huntington Bank came on board, her family delivered almost 50 pieces of luggage to the FIA, along with 32 homemade carrying bags. All included a stuffed animal and a letter to the recipient.

Brendan and Austin think this is all “really neat.” All three children are quite tenderhearted about this entire process. The Ionia-Montcalm District FIA plans to distribute extra luggage to other counties that express a need.

If you are interested in becoming part of this, you can make a donation through the McNeals by calling (616) 225-8449 or contact them by email at [kcl@pathwaynet.com](mailto:kcl@pathwaynet.com)

### Diana

Diana Wesley and her friends at Central Montcalm High School in Stanton decided in autumn 2000 to do a charitable event for the drama program. The students had a drama class, but wanted to do more.

Diana asked her mother about various charities. Diana’s mother is Barb Hustoles, an Adult Services worker at the Family Independence Agency in Montcalm County. With Mom’s help, Diana narrowed it down to foster children. The other students were in total agreement.

Diana was the fundraising play’s director. She and her fellow students put this together, practiced, and built their props in three weeks.

The play was actually two in one called, “Happily Ever After” by Holly Sleight and “Happily Never After” by Tim Kelly. It was subtitled, “A Comedy With a Cause”.

The playbill indicated all proceeds would benefit the foster children in Montcalm County.

### Getting the job done

The play casting was open to all high school students and included an eighth grader and also a seventh grader. The performance took place May 18-19.

All of the construction costs for the props were offset by local businesses. The playbill listed help from Diane’s Family Hair Care, Millard’s Furniture and Appliance, Baker Insurance, Chenoweth Agency, Judy and Company and Mr. Mom’s Cleaning Service.

A bake sale was included and the school provided the space. Diana said coordinating this project with an already full school calendar and no budget made a play a challenge.

All told, the events raised \$430 to assist the foster children in Montcalm County. This money was used to provide activities or items not covered by government funding sources. Diana said, “Seeing community support was awe inspiring...humbling for all to have such an impact on the community...the business support was fantastic too!”

Actually, it appears that both Jaclyn McNeal and Diana Wesley are both “awe inspiring!”



**Above: Diana Wesley presents a check to Jamie Lovelace. Below: cast of the plays**



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# Working Together Through Transition

## Zone 1 staff have opportunity to learn about upcoming changes when Family Independence Program and Prevention Services are delivered together

By Jane Gundry, AP Specialist  
Zone 1 Office, Escanaba  
Telephone (906) 789-7393

MARQUETTE—FIA Zone 1 counties were treated to a unique conference in July to facilitate the upcoming transition of prevention from child welfare to family supportive services.

Northern Michigan University was the setting for this event, which took place from July 31-Aug. 2. More than 200 county directors, family independence specialists and managers, Project Zero coordinators, children's services workers and supervisors, and zone personnel participated.

Zone 1 represents FIA offices in 16 counties on both sides of the Mackinac Bridge.

The conference was to help motivate, train and enable staff to work together toward successful integration of Prevention Services with our Family Independence Program. In order to maximize participation while ensuring local office coverage, two identical one and one-half day sessions were offered back-to-back.

Beginning Oct. 1, family independence specialist duties will be expanded when working with families on their program for independence from cash assistance. Specialists will be trained to review family dynamics during home calls to help determine the need for prevention services.

Jim Nye, FIA Outstate Operations director, gave opening remarks that provided background on the rationale for moving prevention to the family independence specialist's role. He explained where the agency currently is in this transition and the vision for the future.

The keynote speaker, Billy Riggs, a nationally known motivational speaker and self-proclaimed "disillusionist", was a conference highlight. Riggs entertained and enlightened attenders with his grand illusions and magic attitude.

His presentation was tailor made to relate to the challenges our staff have faced in the recent past and with the upcoming prevention transition. Through the use of magic tricks, audience participation and his experience as a counselor, Riggs presentation vividly reminded us that attitude is the key to surviving change and fully enjoying life.

After lunch, the group broke into small groups for an experiential exercise entitled "Team Talk". A fictitious Family Independence Program-Prevention case was used as an opportunity to learn the advantages of partnering through communication across program and county boundaries.

Facilitated by family independence managers, child welfare supervisors or county directors, the groups reviewed this brief scenario—a FIP-Food Stamp family with a history of child protective services plus a new referral. The packet of information included both FIP and services paperwork and forms.

Aided by a guidebook developed by facilitators for this purpose, the groups presented their diverse perspectives on the issues and what they felt was pertinent in working with this family. A major discussion point was how information in the CPS investigation affected the FIP case, and how the FIP case affected the CPS case. Other available resources were shared that could affect the outcome.

Elsewhere during the conference, a management panel provided information and perspectives on the transition based on their FIA roles and responsibilities. The panel, moderated by Zone 1 manager Nancy DeWees, included Nye, Sandy Zwemer from the Family Independence Services staff training unit, Kathleen Langhals, director of Chippewa-Luce FIA, and Robyn Loviska, director of Alger-Schoolcraft FIA.

Written evaluations and informal feedback were overwhelmingly positive. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity for communication between child welfare and FIS, enhancing appreciation for

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# Working Together Through Transition

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one another's roles.

The conference planning committee was co-chaired by Julia Hadas, director of Marquette County FIA, and Steve Lieburn, director of Delta-Menominee FIA.

Committee members included DeWees and Zone 1 staff members John Nelson, Jane Gundry and Scott Parrott, Marquette FIA managers Sharron Plankenhorn and Lyle Trombly. Others assisting included Zone 1 staff Joani Miller and Jay Hubbard.

## Harley-Davidson

### The heart that beats underneath all that leather

By Jane McCracken, Adult Services Specialist and Kari Katalenich, Administrative Analyst

Calhoun County Family Independence Agency, Battle Creek

Telephone (616) 966-1273 (Kari) or 966-1395 (Jane)

Dangerous, tough, macho...these are some of the adjectives that come to mind when one hears the name Harley-Davidson.

Let me assure you that under that tough exterior beats a heart of gold.

An elderly disabled client on Jane McCracken's caseload confided in her that on one of his walks he had found five dollars. He proudly announced that he had taken the money and put a Harley-Davidson watch on layaway. Jane is an adult services specialist with Calhoun County FIA.

Jane's client had owned two Harleys in his youth. Weather permitting, he often walked from his adult foster care home to the local Harley-Davidson store, he said, "Just to keep up on what's new."

Upon hearing the excitement in his voice, Jane didn't have the heart to explain to him that he'd never be able to pay off the watch. His \$44 personal needs money routinely didn't cover the cost of his smoking habit. Unless he won the lottery, he didn't have a prayer of getting that watch out of layaway.

Personal needs money is a monthly amount set by the state given to Adult Foster Care residents to purchase whatever they like.

Wanting to have something to soften the blow when the day came that Jane had to explain the reality of the situation, she wrote to the president of the Harley-Davidson Corporation. Jane wrote of the watch in layaway, and asked if the company would send a promotional item such as a poster or anything with the Harley-Davidson logo on it.

When the square box from Harley-Davidson arrived, Jane was very excited and thought, "Great!"

She thought it must be a coffee mug with the Harley-Davidson logo on it. But it wasn't a coffee mug at all. It was a Harley-Davidson watch!

Some readers may say Jane should have asked for the whole motorcycle. Maybe so, but she's here to tell you that there are angels among us, and some of them are riding Harleys!



**Graphic is not the time piece discussed in the story.**

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# Success!

## Disability Determination Service completes successful test of combined claim manager concept

By John DeSpelder, Area Administrator

Disability Determination Service Northern Area, Traverse City

Telephone (231) 933-6719

LANSING—The FIA Disability Determination Service (DDS) has successfully completed a three-year test of the disability claim manager concept. The DDS, a unit administered by the FIA, works with the Social Security Administration to determine Michigan residents' eligibility for benefits under the federal SSI and SSDI programs.

The test, part of the Social Security Administration's disability process redesign, combined the functions of the DDS disability examiner and the Social Security Administration claims representative into a single worker. That worker was responsible for processing claims for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income from application to adjudication.

### Why this program?

In Michigan the disability claims manager was tested at DDS and Social Security offices in Detroit and Traverse City. There were five state and five federal disability claims managers in each city.

The Social Security Administration created the disability claims manager in response to customer research that showed disability claimants believed:

- The current process is too complicated
- They have to wait too long for a decision
- They want more information and personal contact
- They want a chance to make their case directly to the decision-maker.

The disability claim manager became the single point of contact for the customer, similar to the family independence specialist concept. This is not the case in the current process. The disability claim manager concept combined the job duties of state disability examiners and federal claims representatives. The concept was tested in 15 states.

### Lessons learned

Recently a special recognition day was held for the DDS staff who participated in the test. Michigan DDS director Linda Dorn thanked the group for participating in the test, and for being willing to take some risks and dedicating themselves to learning the job in the expectation that customer service could be improved.

Hal Schimpke, manager of the Traverse City site, is a member of the national evaluation work group. He told the gathering that the test was more successful than expected, and compared to the current process there was better customer and employee satisfaction. Schimpke said Social Security is in the process of preparing an evaluation of the concept and a report is expected later this summer.

The disability claims managers felt the test was very successful and what they learned will serve them and their customers well in their jobs as disability examiners.

At a special event, participants in the test were each given a plaque to recognize their contributions. The plaques read: "Make it Happen—Greatness is not in where we stand, but in what direction we are moving. We must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it—but sail we must, and not drift, nor lie at anchor."

FIA Reengineering and Quality Management director Charles Jones told the group, "You did what people said could not be done, and I want to thank you for that." The disability claim manager test participants are:

- Detroit Service Area: Sharon Giles, disability claims manager (DCM), Janet Herndon-Mosley, DCM, Mary Ann O'Keefe, DCM, Lynda Smith, DCM, Michelle White, DCM, Dale Foot, site manager, Wanda

*continued next page*

# Success!

*continued from page 12*

Whiting, site manager and Otis Kern, area administrator.

■ Northern Service Area: Julie Fernandez, DCM, Kathy Kimbel, DCM, Cheryl Patterson, DCM, D'Ann Runk, DCM, Joseph Sloan, DCM, Hal Schimpke, site manager and John DeSpelder, area administrator.



**DDS staff and administrators pictured above:**  
Seated front: Joseph Sloan; seated behind him from left: Wanda Whiting, Linda Smith and Sharon Giles. Standing from left: Charles Jones, Dale Foot, Janet Herndon-Mosley, Mary Ann O'Keefe, Michelle White, Otis Kern, Cheryl Patterson, D'Ann Runk, Kathy Kimbel, Linda Dorn, Hal Schimpke and John DeSpelder.

## More plaudits for DDS

### Quality Assurance Unit receives regional commissioner citation Staff cited for leadership and positive change toward prototype model

CHICAGO—Region V Social Security Commissioner Jim Martin presented the Michigan DDS Quality Assurance Unit with the region's highest award at a June 7 ceremony.

The recognition event was held at the Harold Washington Social Security Center in downtown Chicago. There, Martin honored 57 individuals and 10 teams from among the hundreds of employees who serve Social Security in the nation's second largest region.

Among those receiving citations was the Michigan DDS Quality Assurance Unit, part of the Administrative Services Program located in Lansing.

The quality assurance team received recognition for its outstanding leadership and support of policy and process changes, as Michigan became one of 10 "prototype" states. The prototype states are field testing a number of changes designed to enhance contact with applicants and ensure their understanding of the program.

Through a special study of cases completed under the new procedures and a number of "in line" quality activities, the Michigan unit provided claims adjudicators with crucial feedback that allowed them to test their understanding and application of the significant program changes. As a result of their efforts, along with the hard work of disability examiners, the Michigan DDS ended Fiscal Year 2000 as the leader in decisional accuracy among the prototype states.

Honorees at the Chicago event included staff who made outstanding contributions to the work of Social Security in one of the several field offices, Offices of Hearings and Appeals and Disability Determination Service offices throughout the region. The DDS makes medical decisions on behalf of the Social Security Administration to qualify persons for SSI and SSDI.



**DDS staff recognized in Chicago and pictured above (l-r):**  
Sherry Trezise, Linda Rademacher, Brenda Hairston, acting Social Security Commissioner Larry Massanari, Sue Braker, Linda Dorn, Maxine Hewett, Ron Sprayman, Theresa Furget, Delores Scott, Regional Social Security Commissioner Jim Martin and Aaron Pringle.

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# First FIA all counties golf challenge

## Work connection turns to leisure for employees from eight counties Tournament to be extended to more counties in future years

By Jim Ruiz, Children's Protective Services  
Calhoun County Family Independence Agency, Battle Creek  
Telephone (616) 966-1411

Over the years, having an FIA golf outing has been a topic at various meetings and training sessions. This year, it became more than talk.

One day in late July, Ailene Buchtrup, a CPS supervisor in Calhoun County, became tired of listening to her staff talk about challenging another county in golf. She contacted Kalamazoo CPS supervisor Tom Cagney who wanted only to meet at the county line and have a contest.

The seed was planted. When other counties heard about it, Chuck Audy (Kent County FIA), Rick Gretzinger (Eaton County FIA), and Mike Cullen (Allegan County FIA), collectively said "When and where? We'll be there."

We found an excellent golf course, Marywood North of Battle Creek. However, we were left with only a few weeks to schedule the event. Teams from Kent, Eaton, Allegan, Kalamazoo, Jackson, Calhoun, and Ingham showed up to vie for the cup. The rules were simple:

- Only current and retired FIA employees could participate.
- The winning team will host the next outing unless they are a defending champion, in which case the last place team will host the next challenge.
- Multi-county teams were eligible.
- If a multi-county team wins, the person from the county farthest from the current outing will host the next challenge.
- Games are conducted according to a "scramble" format, winter rules.
- In case of a tie, it's off to the putting green. Mark off ten paces and have each team putt. If it remains tied after each team putts once, it becomes sudden death.
- Traveling trophies would be given for first and last place.

On August 24, eight teams met at Marywood Golf Course. The teams socialized for about an hour before we teed off and many individuals realized that they already knew each other.

The Allegan FIA team showed up with youth movement ringers (in sports parlance, a "ringer" is someone very good at the sport when you are expecting a novice). Ingham FIA had only one day's notice and brought the real ringer, Deanna Cullimore.

Jackson FIA came with two teams and vowed to have fun no matter what happened. The experienced golfers from Kent FIA couldn't wait to get on the tee—then maybe their cell phones would stop ringing!

Eaton County brought experience without the cell phones. They just wanted to enjoy the day.

Kalamazoo and Calhoun FIA could only say, "Any day on the golf course is better than one hour at the office."

### Hi tech carts

Marywood's golf carts all had an electronic guidance system to assist players and hints on how to play the course. The system was also useful for requesting food and refreshments!

Ingham County led the way off the tee, and at the turn was already four under par to lead Kent (-2) and Eaton (-2).

"Par" is the standard measure of golf score per hole. Two under par, or -2, means the team played the hole at two fewer strokes than the norm. Generally speaking, the average hole on a golf course has a par of four strokes.

The back nine at Marywood is intimidating with blind greens, fairway traps and everyone's favorite...water. The back nine would give a little and took even more as the day went on.

The “back nine” are holes number 10-18 at an 18-hole golf course. Smaller golf courses have only nine holes. In the end Ingham stayed at -4 while Kent was having a difficult time struggling at -3 for most of the back nine until birthday boy Mike Deerfield holed out a 60-yard chip to a blind hole. This put Kent in a tie with Ingham with only a few holes to play.

#### One winner, two trophies

Kent marched down the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway with purpose and played each shot to give them a chance at a birdie (a score of one under par). The birdie became reality when Chuck Audy sank the putt to put Kent at -5, winning the initial challenge.

It's hats off and congratulations to Chuck Audy, Henry Roukema, Al Craig and Mike Deerfield of Kent County. They are our first champions and the next hosts of the FIA Golf Challenge.

But let's not forget there was another trophy at stake. While Kent and Ingham were battling it out for bragging rights, a very important position was still up for grabs.

Bill Boody and Jackson County Team No. 1 were busy mapping out areas of Marywood that most golfers never see. Not only was this a very fun team to have at the outing, they came for the best reason of all, to have fun away from the office.

Their final score of +5 was very respectable considering some of the problems the course gave them. For their effort they earned the honor of the “Last Place Trophy”.

As the possibility of hosting the tournament goes only to first and last, they are the only recognized teams. So Bill, Patty Tichenor, Brian Stephenson and Dale Phillips, “Well done!”

The tournament was held during working hours and we all used annual leave to play. The outing was not officially sponsored by the FIA, but will always be comprised only of FIA employees. This is for bragging rights, a chance to meet other employees, travel to different counties and golf courses, and a good excuse to get away from the office.

We look forward to a very well represented outing at the second challenge to be held in Kent County in 2002. Through Labor Day, we had heard from people in 13 counties and Central Office with interest in next year's tourney. The idea is to have the challenge move all over the state, and make it possible for all counties to be involved.

To get more information, contact Chuck Audy at (616) 247-6089 or by email at [AudyC@state.mi.us](mailto:AudyC@state.mi.us) for details for the next outing. This will be a shotgun start, and we look for lower scores (a winner in golf has the *lowest* score) and, of course, a lot of fun!

■ A “scramble” is where each team plays the best single shot on each hole by the team. It speeds up the game and lowers scores. A “shotgun” start is where each team goes to a different hole, then everyone tees off at the same time at different holes. This way they all finish at or near the same time without having to wait for everyone on the first hole. Contact the author for help with any other golf terminology.



***It was a fun day for everyone this year where that little white ball tended to put everyone on an equal level—administrators to secretaries were represented, but for one day we were all just golfers. I enjoyed it because it increased my network on a personal level...and because I got a few shots that stayed in the fairway!***

# Brand names come to new MCB cafeteria

**Detroit's McNamara  
Building is home to  
Fountain View Café,  
newest Business  
Enterprise Program facility**

**By Fred Wurtzel, Administrator  
Business Enterprise Program  
Michigan Commission for the Blind  
Lansing**

**Telephone (517) 373-2064**

**DETROIT**—The McNamara Federal Building is a typical 1970s-era government building. A 26-story poured concrete structure in downtown Detroit, it looks like the place you'd expect – until you get to the “cafeteria.”

## Home of name brands

The aroma of Pizza Hut pizza, the sounds of sizzling Oscar Mayer hot dogs, fresh bread just out of the oven at Subway, the irresistible aroma of fresh-brewed Starbucks coffee...the bright lights and glistening glass, tiles and polished metal all combine to make you wonder if you had been transported to Great Lakes Crossing or some other trendy suburban mall.

In its latest move to remain customer-oriented and on the cutting edge, the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) Business Enterprise Program has partnered with the U. S. General Services Administration to convert a traditional government style cafeteria into an attractive food court. The new Fountain View Cafe features Pizza Hut, Subway, Starbucks Coffee, Dunkin' Donuts, Columbo frozen yogurt and Oscar Mayer hot dogs.

The grand opening and ribbon cutting was July 31 at the McNamara Building, located at the intersection of Cass and Michigan avenues in downtown Detroit. The Fountain View Cafe is open to the public from 6:30 a. m. to 2 p.m. weekdays.

## Experienced operator

The high tech complex facility employs 17 staff and operator Darron Worden. Darron, a former MCB client, has operated three other facilities in the Business Enterprise Program including the Kent County FIA snack bar in Grand Rapids.

Darron has taken on this challenge with his customary high energy and good humor. There have been plenty of challenges, including hiring his staff and making sure they all get through the security clearance process and get the required health department training. Darron is a great role model of how blind people can meet any challenge with good training and a positive attitude.

From the first day of operation the sparkling and diverse facility has served more than 1,000



**Two perspectives  
from the Fountain  
View Cafe in Detroit, a  
brand name facility  
managed by Michigan  
Commission for the  
Blind.**



*continued next page*

customers a day in a building housing 2,500 persons. This is a very good trend since the facility opened in the summer, a traditionally slow time for the cafeteria business.

#### **Credit given where due**

Much credit for the new enterprise goes to the General Services Administration who paid most renovation costs in the building. Kudos also to McVetty and Associates, the consultant for restaurant design and operation.

#### **Business Enterprise Program**

The facility is operated by the MCB Business Enterprise Program, which helps blind and visually impaired persons run businesses in government buildings.

Under the program more than 100 blind persons are licensed to provide food and vending services in state and federal buildings, rest areas and post offices.

Through the Fountain View Café, Michigan is leading the way nationally with the first “branded concept facility” in the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

Beginning as simple candy and tobacco stands in post office lobbies in 1936, the national Randolph-Sheppard Program has grown to nearly 3,000 facilities and is America’s sixth-largest food service organization.

#### **Roots**

With roots dating from 1939, Public Act 260 of 1978 enables Michigan to operate facilities under the national program through the MCB Business Enterprise Program.

## **FIA and the Winter Olympics**

### **Central Office employee to carry Olympic torch**

### **Connie Norman to be part of 13,500 mile trek**

By Eugene Wilson

FIA Children’s Foster Care Division, Lansing

Telephone (517) 335-6077



**Connie**

The 2001 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City will be memorable to one FIA employee for a very special reason.

Connie Norman, a 14-year employee and policy analyst for the Children’s Protective Services and Foster Care Division, has been selected to carry the Olympic torch as it makes its way across America in the Olympic Torch Relay. The relay begins Dec. 4 in Atlanta, the last place the Olympic torch rested on American soil.

“You have been nominated to carry the flame not because of your athletic ability, but because of your inspirational spirit that has touched the community around you,” said Connie’s notice from the Salt Lake Olympic Committee.

“One of the primary Olympic ideals is to unify nations, cultures and communities. At the moment you carry the flame, you are the only person in the world with that privilege.”

Having responded to a Lansing State Journal advertisement in March, Connie followed up on instructions to apply for this once in a lifetime opportunity and was ultimately selected to be among 11,500 people to carry the torch through 46 states over a 61-day period.

“I am tremendously excited and honored,” she said. “It is a great opportunity to promote world understanding, sportsmanship, and community spirit.”

We share in Connie’s pride and excitement and look forward to January 6, 2002 when she’ll represent her family and friends as an Olympic torchbearer. She will be notified by December where to perform this duty. It will be within 200 miles of her home.

Each torchbearer will carry the flame two-tenths of one mile. A support runner will be assigned to accompany each runner by the Salt Lake Olympic Committee.

The Salt Lake Torch Relay will cover more than 13,500 miles between Atlanta and Salt Lake City, where the relay will end Feb. 8, 2002.

In addition to torchbearers, the Olympic flame will be transported by automobile, airplane, train, ship, skier, horse drawn sleigh, snowmobile, ice skater, covered wagon and other modes of transit.

# Romulus helps give LIFE to FIA customers

## Summer family enrichment program graduates 31 to better lives

### FIA, Work First contractor, school district collaborate on project

By Gene Hashley, Communications Director

Wayne County Family Independence Agency, Detroit

Telephone (313) 256-1560

WAYNE, Mich.—Thirty-one customers of Wayne County's Romulus district office were recognized for completing the Learning Innovative Family Enrichment, or LIFE, program during August graduation ceremonies held at the city of Wayne Community Center.

The six-week LIFE program was a collaborative effort of the Romulus FIA district, Employment and Training Designs Inc. Work First contractor (ETDI) and the Wayne-Westland Schools. It was designed to reach hard-to-serve FIA customers during the summer and was funded by the Partnership for Adult Learning (PAL).



During the six-week program, customers participated in academic enhancement classes to improve basic education skills such as math and reading or to obtain a GED. They also participated in occupational skills training in the areas of computer-aided design, electronics home repair, culinary arts or health occupations.

ETDI provided transportation from the customer's home to and from the William D. Ford Career and Technical Center in Westland. Students in the culinary arts program prepared lunch.

Romulus FIA district manager Allah Shamoan delivered the keynote address at the graduation ceremony.

"Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're nobody," he said. You *are* somebody."

Kathy Beeny, Romulus Project Zero coordinator, reminded the participants that at their initial orientation her message was "YAGOTTAWANNA". She congratulated them on their success and presented "YAGOTTAWANNA" award certificates to each graduate.

Initially, Romulus family independence specialists referred 144 customers to the program. Of that group 42 were selected and 31 completed instruction.

Through August, about half of the graduating class has been hired into the Ford Motor Company PAL Training Program and several have found other employment. Six of the 12 GED students have taken and passed the exam.



# Thinking Diversity, Practicing Inclusion

## Last year's best Diversity Week events acknowledged in June

By Mary Hall-Thiam

FIA Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, Lansing

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Email [hall-thiam@state.mi.us](mailto:hall-thiam@state.mi.us)

The Family Independence Agency's first annual diversity workshop, "Thinking Diversity, Practicing Inclusion—Our Vision for the 21st Century and Beyond", is Oct. 5 at the Valley Plaza Resort in Midland. The workshop replaces the annual Equal Opportunity and Diversity Awareness Week celebration.

This premiere event highlights best practices in the areas of diversity and equal opportunity and how these concepts can be used to accomplish the Family Independence Agency's critical success factors. It also serves to sensitize and inform staff on historical roots and emerging trends among our internal and external customers.

Many recipients of the 2001 "Excellence through Teamwork" awards share their winning strategies during the event. At the FIA's June director's meeting, district and county offices were recognized for efforts to extend equal opportunity and diversity awareness throughout the agency.

Twenty-two offices received certificates indicating that their efforts were above average. Twelve of the 22 offices were also honored with plaques for their exceptional efforts in planning numerous activities or events that embraced the concepts of equal opportunity and diversity. The FIA offices recognized were:

- Clinton County.
- Gladwin County.
- Isabella County.
- Kent County.
- Monroe County.
- Muskegon County.
- Oakland County District III.
- Oceana County.
- Ottawa County.
- Saginaw County.
- Shiawassee County.
- Southwest Service Area Disability Determination Service.
- St. Clair County.
- Van Buren County.
- Wayne County CFS North Central.
- Wayne County Disability Determination Service.
- Wayne County Lafayette Medical District.
- Wayne County Redford District.
- Wayne County Schoolcraft-Stansbury District.
- Wayne County Oakman-Grand River.
- Wayne County Warren-Connor District.
- Zone 4 – Outstate Operations.

## Correction

A story on an FIA Spanish-English proofreading work group that appeared in the September 2001 issue of FIA Icon should have listed **LeSandra Sierra** as a member of the work group. Sierra works at the Wayne County FIA Fort Wayne District office in Detroit.

FIA Icon regrets any inconvenience caused by this omission.

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## New state prescription drug program for seniors

**EPIC provides enhanced benefits to qualifying individuals and families with income up to 200 percent of poverty**  
**insure.com**

Michigan low-income seniors already enrolled in the state's prescription drug assistance programs will be given the first opportunity to sign up for a new one, says a Michigan health official.

Members of the Michigan Emergency Pharmaceutical Program for Seniors (MEPPS) and the state's Prescription Drug Tax Credit program will be the first to be eligible for year-round prescription drug coverage under the state's new EPIC program.

"The EPIC program will provide comprehensive prescription coverage for seniors most in need of assistance," said Michigan Department of Community Health director James K. Haveman, who announced the program in June.

The EPIC program (stands for Elder Prescription Insurance Coverage) will cover most prescription drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration, including insulin and syringes.

The first groups EPIC will enroll are MEPPS and the tax credit. If funding remains after these groups—which are designated by the legislature as priority groups—are enrolled, the program will be available to other qualifying residents.

### Program details

"The benefits in the EPIC program are much broader than those currently available to seniors in need," says Lynn Alexander, director of the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging.

The EPIC program allows Michigan residents age 65 and over with a household income at or below 200 percent of poverty to participate in the program. Any person currently covered by Medicaid or who is found eligible for Medicaid is not eligible for EPIC, since Medicaid covers prescription drugs. Seniors who are enrolled in Medicare are eligible as long as they do not have any other form of prescription drug coverage.

The cost of coverage to an enrollee will be based on household income. For a person or couple with an income at or below 100 percent of poverty, there would be no premium. For all others, the premium increases as household income increases, not to exceed 5 percent of the household income.

### Program development, funding

A portion of tobacco settlement funds was allocated to establish the program. Other funding comes from the repeal of the existing senior drug tax credit and Michigan Emergency Pharmaceutical Program for Seniors.

Seniors who have received MEPPS benefits in fiscal year 2000 and who are eligible for EPIC will receive benefits beginning Oct. 1. The next group to be enrolled will be those who received the senior tax credit this tax year.

This group can expect to begin receiving enrollment information in the mail in October. Those who qualify from this second group will begin receiving EPIC benefits on Dec. 1. Open enrollment will follow and will be dependent on fund availability.

■ **The Michigan Department of Community Health has established more than 150 EPIC senior centers throughout the state. Seniors may call the toll-free EPIC hotline for senior center locations, eligibility, and enrollment information: (866) 747-5844.**

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# Dealing with depression or alcohol abuse?

## Confidential help is available for state employees

■ From the Michigan Employee Service Program, administered through the Office of State Employer

“Bill” began to notice feeling irritable and tired. As the weeks went by, getting through the day became an effort. Bill’s productivity at work gradually decreased and when he was home, he seemed to have little energy for anything more than simply sitting and staring at television.

Bill’s family and friends grew concerned, as he became increasingly withdrawn. At work, his supervisor began to talk with him about his poor productivity. Still, Bill did not want anyone - especially at work - to know that he was dealing with being depressed. Instead, he started using his sick leave, in order to avoid the problem. Bill’s family became alarmed and made an appointment for him to see his doctor. After reviewing symptoms, his doctor diagnosed a major depressive disorder, requiring hospital treatment.

■■■

“Ann” called in sick for the fourth time this month, due to another hangover. Ann recalled what others had been saying to her for weeks, about how she has been drinking more and how she has changed as a result.

Ann also wondered about what would happen if she did not get some help. If only she knew how to get some help, without anyone knowing.

■■■

Are you concerned about either depression or alcohol misuse? The **Telephone Alcohol and Depression Screening Program**, sponsored by the state of Michigan’s Employee Service Program, may be for you. By calling **1-800-887-5676** and spending three to five minutes answering pre-recorded questions, you can receive immediate information, telling you if you have symptoms consistent with depression, alcohol misuse, or both. In addition, this call will also provide you with guidance on how to use your health insurance to obtain further evaluation and possible treatment. All of this is done completely anonymously—you will never need to identify yourself.

### More questions?

In Lansing call (517) 373-7630 or (800) 521-1377.  
In Detroit call (313) 256-3619 or (800) 872-5563.

# Marketing savvy

## The most powerful words in sales are ... “which mean”

By Bonnie J. Knuston, PhD

■ Reprinted in edited form with permission from *Lansing Business Monthly*, August 2001 issue, where this was first published. For more information consult their website: [www.lansingbusinessmonthly.com](http://www.lansingbusinessmonthly.com)

Even though the FIA doesn't usually sell services to customers, this message may still be relevant. Translating the importance of services...i.e., food stamps for an elderly couple to help meet their nutritional needs, adult home help for those who don't want to believe they are unable to do it all anymore, prevention or preservation for a family that can't cope with the pressures of life...may help customers accept services as something to meet their needs.

What's wrong with these pictures? “I was in the market for a new car. One of the sales-men kept telling me, “You're gonna love this; it's got a V-8.”

“I was helping a friend choose a location for her daughter's wedding reception. The banquet managers kept touting that their rooms would seat 250 people, or 300, or 350.”

“I headed to a home superstore to buy a set of sheets. The retailer said, “This set has 330 threads per inch, not 180.”

Again I ask, what's wrong? In all three, the number one rule of sales is violated: sell benefits, not features. Few master the art of translating product features into the customer benefits. The most successful can fall prey to it.

But there's a trick to help you. It's called the “...which means...” addendum. At the end of every features statement, you mentally add the words “which means.” to remind you to translate product features into benefits for your customer.

“It's got a V-8...which means...you'll have the power to accelerate to safely pass in traffic and get out of the way of accidents.” I feel safer already.

“This room will comfortably seat 300 people ... which means ... your family will be able to share this special event with you.” Hurrah! I won't have to decide between Aunt Harriet and Uncle Stanley.

“This set has 330 threads per inch, not 180...which means...the sheets are smoother to your skin and will stay softer longer.” I can't wait to curl up in bed with a good book.

One of my mentors used to say communication is simply shared meaning. In other words, to communicate with your customers, you have to be able to translate features into their benefits language. Most sales pitches are made with the assumption that the customer wants to know about the company, the product, the hours, the location and the delivery schedule. Wrong. In reality, customers don't want to be bothered about these things; they are way too busy for that. They simply want to know what's in it for them. They want to know why they should even care. They want a reason to buy from you. Can you save them time? Make them money? Improve their image? Keep them safer? Strengthen family ties? Or wrap them in luxurious softness? If you can't communicate these benefits, don't waste their time.

You see your product from an intellectual point of view. You know the hours of training your people have gone through. But your customers see only what your product can do for them..

Most customers buy with emotion and use logic to justify the purchase. Customers will buy the product that makes them feel the best. The question is, then, whose product do they feel best about—yours or your competitors'? The job of sales is to make sure they feel best about yours. And the only way you can do that is to sell the benefits.

To illustrate, let me paraphrase a story told by advertising wizard, Roy Williams. One day, the owner of a jewelry store saw one of his salespeople watching an older gentleman who was looking at jewelry in the window. The salesperson was naturally happy when the man walked into the store and wanted to see the bracelet. She scurried over to the window, retrieved the bracelet and brought it to him. Seeing that the price was only \$400, he said, “I'll take it.”

The storeowner continued watching them from across the store until the sales person placed his gift-wrapped box into a bag and thanked the customer for coming in.

Seeing that he was about to leave, the owner walked over to gentleman and said, “I see that you bought the marvelous jade bracelet in the window. Is it for her birthday or your anniversary?”

The gentleman said that it was to be a gift for his wife on their wedding anniversary.

*continued on page 23*

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## The most powerful words in sales are ... *continued from page 22*

“I guarantee she’s going to love it,” replied the owner. “That’s really a very special bracelet, and I can promise you that none of her friends has ever seen anything like it. Before you leave, let me show you a necklace that goes just perfectly with it. Maybe some day you’ll want to add it to the bracelet.”

The customer followed the storeowner over, where he presented an \$8,500 necklace over his arm, saying, “If you ever want to take her breath away and see her cry, just give her this.” Five minutes later, the gentleman walked out the door with a second package in the bag. He bought the necklace immediately because the storeowner sold him the benefits—not the necklace.

There is a postscript to this story. A few days after the sale, the owner received a note from the gentleman’s wife.

“I only wish you could have seen his face when I gasped and began to cry. When I saw how startled he was, [my husband] told me what you had said that made him buy the necklace, and then we both laughed and laughed and laughed until we had to sit on the floor. Thank you for making this the happiest anniversary any two people have ever had.”

Then she added, “Harry has promised me that he will never again shop at any jewelry store but yours.”

■ **Bonnie J. Knutson, PhD** is a professor at The School of Hospitality Business and Broad College of Business at Michigan State University.

***The only thing your customers are interested in is what’s in it for them. They don’t care about the size of the engine, how many chairs fit into a room or the number of threads in an inch of bedding. What they do care about is safety, family and softness.***

For information about FIA programs, consult our Internet web address: [www.mfia.state.mi.us](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us)

*The Family Independence Agency will not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, age, height, weight, national origin, color, height, weight, marital status, political beliefs or disability. If you need help with reading, writing, hearing, etc., under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you are invited to make your needs known to an FIA Office in your county.*